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Justification of intergroup violence – the role of right-wing authoritarianism and propensity for radical action

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ABSTRACT

Economic and political trends of the last decades resulted in a general rise in anti-minority populism in Hungary. Anti-minority sentiments have been manifested in violence primarily against the Roma, but also against other target groups. The aim of the current study is to reveal the social psychological mechanisms of justifying intergroup violence against outgroups representing a symbolic or a physical threat. Considering that right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) can legitimize violence against threatening outgroups, we hypothesized that RWA would be more important in explaining justification of intergroup violence than a general propensity for radical action. We tested our hypothesis using computer-assisted personal interviews using a representative sample of 1000 respondents. Using structural equation modelling, we found that RWA was a much stronger predictor of the justification of intergroup violence against both physically and symbolically threatening groups than propensity for radical action. Furthermore, a comparison of the groups also revealed that those who justify violence against symbolically threatening groups were also higher in right-wing authoritarianism. These findings highlight that RWA justifies politically motivated aggression against different target groups in Hungary.

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Justification of intergroup violence; right-wing authoritarianism; propensity for radical protest; dual-process model; Hungary

Violent street rioting in 2006, a serial murder case and physical offences against the Roma by far-right paramilitary groups, and attacks against gay and lesbian people during several pride marches are just some examples to indicate that politically motivated intergroup violence is an existing problem in Hungary. Since the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015, violent language in politics has been on the rise (Goździak & Márton, 2018). We investigated which groups have a higher chance of becoming victims of violence and what the social psychological mechanisms are that justify intergroup violence. Specifically, we were interested in the role of ideology and right-wing authoritarianism in triggering political violence against different target groups.

Violence – for example in the context of protests – can be an expression of strong political discontent (Muller & Jukam, 1983), grievance (Lemieux & Asal, 2010), or the outcome of intergroup situations that are perceived stable and illegitimate (Livingstone,

Spears, Manstead, & Bruder, 2009; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006). Discontent can be explained by group-based – so-called “fraternal” – relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966), when people feel that their group is at a disadvantaged compared to other groups or their situation improves less than that of other groups, resulting in feelings of injustice and resentment. Deprivation is a subjective psychological state, and it is independent from objective socio-economic status (King & Taylor, 2011). Relative deprivation and discontent can be the hotbeds of violent political action (Daskin, 2016) like radical protest, which seems to be an acceptable method to abolish the injustices.

In addition to perceived injustices, frustration of basic human needs, such as the need for security, positive identity, and feeling of effectiveness, can also lead to the loss of well-being – as a result of difficult social conditions, economic problems, and political conflicts (Staub, 1999). The combination of difficult, frustrating societal conditions and intergroup conflicts enhance the probability of violence (Staub, 2000). Groups that are perceived responsible for the injustices can become the targets of violence (Daskin, 2016). Scapegoating, the process of putting the blame on an outgroup for the frustrating conditions, cannot only target the groups “below” – disadvantaged, less-powerful and incompetent groups – but also the groups “above” – competent groups that are perceived to be more dangerous (Glick, 2002).

Most forms of violence are perceived as morally unacceptable – therefore, political violence usually needs ideological justification (Daskin, 2016). Ideologically fuelled stereotypes depict outgroups as malicious, harmful, and influential and can legitimize aggression against them (Glick, 2002; Staub, 2000). Therefore, violence against these outgroups can potentially be perceived as necessary self-defence, and normative to the ingroup (Glick, 2002). Furthermore, if people are alienated from the political system (Muller & Jukam, 1983), if they have insufficient political power, and if they think that political aggression is acceptable in order to reach important goals, they may choose participation in aggressive political protests as a form of expressing their opinion (Tausch et al., 2011). Terrorism can be seen as a moral act, a form of heroism for the supporters of the terrorist groups (Horgan, 2005). Therefore, the ideologies of the ingroup can legitimize or even reward violence.

The importance of right-wing authoritarianism in explaining intergroup violence

When it comes to the ideological or attitudinal affinity to embrace ideologies that justify political violence, individual differences also matter. Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981) is one of the important factors when it comes to the justification of political violence. RWA comprises three surface traits: authoritarian submission, conventionalism, and authoritarian aggression. Authoritarians believe that the world is a threatening and dangerous place, as RWA is based on the motivations of social control and security (Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielmann, 2005a; Duckitt, 2001, 2006). Authoritarians are motivated to preserve ingroup norms (Duriez & van Hiel, 2002; Lippa & Arad, 1999), so they value social conformity rather than individual autonomy (Cohrs et al., 2005aa; Duckitt, 2001).

Right-wing authoritarianism is directly associated with the ideological justification of political violence. Previous research suggests that RWA predicts antidemocratic and militaristic attitudes (Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielman, 2005b), such as attitudes

towards war, corporal punishment, and penal code violence (Benjamin, 2006), and the restriction of civil liberties (Cohrs, Kielmann, Maes, & Moschner, 2005). RWA also predicted abusive and torture-like behaviour (Dambrun & Vatiné, 2010; Larsson, Björklund, & Bäckström, 2012). Authoritarian aggression and prejudice are due to submission to authorities and their norms, and the uncritical acceptance of the leader's statements that devalue the norm-breaker groups (Lippa & Arad, 1999).

RWA is also associated with negative intergroup attitudes (Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007) related to the motivational goals of security, cohesion, group, and societal order, and the perceived threat that culturally different outgroups represent to this order (Hadarics & Kende, 2018b). When outgroups are perceived as threatening, people with high RWA are more likely to turn to aggression to defend their group. Willingness to kill, torture, and hunt down immigrants is connected to a perception of immigrants as violating ingroup norms (Thomsen, Green, & Sidanius, 2008). People high on RWA may feel morally superior to norm breakers, which leads to hostile attitudes and violence towards them (Altemeyer, 2006).

Groups as targets of violence

According to the Dual-Process Model (DPM), RWA-based prejudice is directed either towards groups that are physically dangerous, or towards groups that threaten the existing conventions and stability of society (Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). The DPM named the first type of groups "Dangerous groups". These groups can harm directly, and cause threat to security. Terrorists, violent criminals, drug dealers, drug users, Satanists, and others who are perceived as dangerous to our physical security and as able to disrupt safety belong to this cluster. "Dissident groups", on the other hand, reject and violate the norms accepted by the authoritarian person, and therefore represent a symbolic, and not a physical threat. According to the original study, prostitutes, atheists, feminists, protestors, and groups criticizing authority belong to this category of outgroups, as they are perceived to cause disagreement and disunity (Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). While cultural variations in the perception of groups exist, dangerous and dissident groups could be distinguished in Hungary as well (Hadarics & Kende, 2018a). The distinction between dangerous and dissident groups is similar to the distinction between realistic and symbolic threat in the framework of integrated threat theory (Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999). Realistic threat involves threats to the existence and physical welfare of the ingroup, while symbolic threat can be defined as a threat to the worldview of the ingroup: the moral rightness of values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Although RWA predicts prejudice against both physically dangerous and symbolically threatening groups (Asbrock, Sibley, & Duckitt, 2010), violence against physically dangerous groups can be justified as self-defence, and therefore aggression is more acceptable against these groups than against other types of outgroups. However, violence against symbolically threatening groups needs further justification than self-defence, as the harm they represent to the ingroup is less tangible. In a study about different intergroup contexts in Hungary, negative stereotypes about different outgroups' norm-violating misbehaviour served as a justification for their moral exclusion for those high in RWA (Hadarics & Kende, 2018b). Threat to social cohesion, stability, and

order are common reasons against norm-breaker groups (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007), and authoritarians are highly sensitive to these threats. As RWA ensures the ideological, value-based legitimization that helps to let aggression be seen as justified (Gerber & Jackson, 2017), we can expect that RWA has a more important role in explaining the justification of violence against symbolically threatening groups than propensity for radical protest, which lacks such ideological component.

We aimed to reveal whether the use of violence is justified differently against physically dangerous and symbolically threatening outgroups, and to reveal the social psychological mechanisms of justifying intergroup violence.

The context of the current study: Hungary

Changes in the political and economic system and the collapse of state socialism in 1989 in Hungary has severely transformed social relations. The high unemployment rate in the first decade after the transition, and a lack of security and trust among citizens (Bunce & Csanádi, 1993), intolerance for inequality and the demand for redistribution (Tóth, 2008), and alienation from the political institutions (Kovács, 2013) were among the consequences of the transformation from state socialism to liberal democracy in the region. As the state's oppressive power and its "monopoly" in defining the nation's enemies declined and gave way to free speech, animosity and hostile speech flourished, as people were free to express their hostility towards social, ethnic, and religious minorities. As a result, there was a rise in the verbal and physical attacks against these groups, as some kind of "democratization of animosity" (Bustikova, 2015).

The economic crisis in 2008 further increased the level of general discontent and helped the rise of the extreme right (Kovács, 2013) radical, populist, and ultranationalist right-wing ideologies (Krekó & Juhász, 2018) and hostility towards minorities (Vidra & Fox, 2014). Anti-elitist and penal populist ideologies dominate public discourse. For instance, discourse about "Gypsy-crime" was initiated, proposing a collective criminalization of Roma people, an increase in sentencing and public spending on police (Boda, Szabó, Bartha, Medve-Bálint, & Vidra, 2015). On the local level, some political players could exploit the "scapegoat-based policy-making", in which the ethnic minorities are becoming victims of systemic ethnic discrimination (Kovarek, Róna, Hunyadi, & Krekó, 2017). The punitive attitudes of the general population are the highest in Hungary compared to other European countries (Boda et al., 2015). In sum, dominant social norms create an environment in which violence can be seen as justified and necessary; therefore, it is especially essential to reveal the social psychological mechanisms of justifying intergroup violence in this context.

The current research

As we have seen, dissatisfaction and alienation from the political system can increase participation in radical protest (Muller & Jukam, 1983), and groups perceived to be responsible for the ingroup's ill fate and frustration can become targets of this violence (Glick, 2002; Staub, 1999, 2000). However, the justification of intergroup violence can also be connected to the specific social and ideological attitude cluster of right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981). The purpose of the study is to identify the social

psychological explanations of accepting and legitimizing intergroup violence. Understanding how people justify aggression against different groups is crucial for tackling violent behaviour and attitudes.

We investigated whether aggression can be justified against symbolically threatening and physically dangerous groups in the contemporary Hungarian context. Although we assumed that both propensity for radical protest and right-wing authoritarianism would explain the justification of intergroup violence, we hypothesized that RWA would predict it more strongly than general propensity for radical protest (Hypothesis 1), as RWA gives ideological reasons to legitimize aggression against threatening outgroups. We also presumed that those who justify violence against symbolically threatening groups would be higher in right-wing authoritarianism (Hypothesis 2), because RWA gives an ideological basis for the justification of violence as a tool also against symbolically threatening groups.

Method

Data collection and participants

We relied on a data set of a nationally representative survey conducted by Ipsos, a public opinion research company. The questionnaire was put together by the Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute that provided us with the data set for secondary analysis. The data and materials that support the findings of this study are available upon individual request from Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute.

Pollsters of Ipsos contacted those respondents who agreed to participate and fit into the quota set which was based on the recent national census (Population Census, 2011). The non-response rate was not provided by Ipsos. Pollsters questioned respondents using computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI), and the interviews took place in the respondents' homes. It was an omnibus survey that measured several other constructs not mentioned in this study. Because the survey was long and served multiple purposes, we could only use shortened scales to measure the variables for our current study.

One thousand individuals participated in the research. The sample of the omnibus survey was matched to the recent national census (Population Census, 2011), and was representative in terms of gender, age, education, and settlement type for the Hungarian adult population (over the age of 18 years). For instance, 17.4% of the resident population lives in Budapest, 52.1% in other towns, and 30.5% in villages according to the national census, and in our sample the proportions were 18.1% for Budapest, 52.9% for towns, and 29% for villages.

Measures

Propensity for radical protest

We measured whether people intended to participate in illegal strikes and demonstrations or engaged in violent and harmful protests in order to preserve values that were important for them, by listing different situations. If they had never participated in any of the listed situations, they could indicate their willingness to participate. Although

willingness and real participation are not the same things, we measured both as intention is a reliable precursor of behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). We measured propensity for radical protest with these items. Respondents rated these statements on a scale of 1–3, where 1 meant “would never do”, 2 stood for “might do” and 3 meant “have already done”. The items are presented in Table 1.

We analysed the factor structure of these items, assuming that they would constitute one factor. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .88, and only one factor emerged with an eigenvalue of 4.57. This factor explained 57.10% of the total variance. The factor loadings ranged from .69 to .80. We created a mean-based index instead of factor scores, to ensure that all situations are included with the same weight. The reliability of this index proved to be excellent (Cronbach α = .91).

Justification of violence against outgroups

Groups were selected to represent heterogeneous categories that often appear in Hungarian public discourse, such as the Roma, criminals, terrorists, politicians, banks, Jews, multinational companies, lesbian and gay people, and authoritarian leaders undermining democracy. Criminals were chosen to represent tangible deviance. Politicians, authoritarian leaders undermining democracy, banks, and multinational companies were included because they are perceived as influential, powerful, and they possess control over resources.

Respondents had to evaluate whether the use of violence could be justified against these groups. They responded on a Likert scale of 1–5, where 1 = completely unjustifiable and 5 = completely justifiable. They had to rate the groups separately. We analysed the factor structure of these groups, and assumed a two-factor solution. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring with promax rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .90. Two factors emerged: the first factor had an eigenvalue of 5.20, and the second an eigenvalue of 1.24. These two explained 71.53% of the total variance. Using Kaiser’s criterion, we selected these two factors as their eigenvalue was larger than 1. The two-factor solution was also supported by confirmatory factor analysis: this model ($\chi^2(24) = 149.01, p < .000, RMSEA = .074, TLI = .946, CFI = .964, SRMR = .030$) fitted the data much better than a model with one factor, which had unacceptable model fit ($\chi^2(27) = 701.52, p < .000, RMSEA = .163, TLI = .740, CFI = .805, SRMR = .101$). The correlation between the factors was $r = .47, p < .001$. The pattern matrix of the explorative factor analysis with the factor loadings is seen in Table 2.

Table 1. The items of propensity for radical protest scale.

1. Participate in violent action if your livelihood was in danger
2. Defame an immoral politician, even in his presence
3. Join an illegal strike
4. Join an illegal demonstration
5. Fight the police if your livelihood was in danger
6. Participate in a violent act to defend your opinion or values
7. Would you hit or throw something at an immoral politician if she or he was near you?
8. Fight the police to protect your opinion and values

Note. Statements are rated on a scale of 1 to 3, where 1 meant “would never do”, 2 stood for “might do” and 3 meant “have already done”.

Table 2. Pattern matrix of groups with factor loadings.

	Factor	
	1	2
Multinational companies	.93	
Jews	.93	
Banks	.86	
Politicians	.84	
Lesbian and gay people	.77	
Authoritarian leaders undermining democracy	.67	
Roma	.65	
Terrorists		.94
Criminals		.86

The first factor comprised multinational companies, Jews, banks, politicians, lesbian and gay people, authoritarian leaders undermining democracy, and Roma people. Influential groups and minority groups belonged to this factor. Terrorists and criminals loaded on the second factor. We created two indices from the two factors that we used in subsequent analyses. We again computed a mean-based index instead of factor scores. We named the first factor “symbolically threatening groups”, and the second “physically dangerous groups”. The reliability proved to be excellent for symbolically threatening groups (Cronbach $\alpha = .93$), and the correlation between physically dangerous groups was high as well ($r = .79, p < .001$).

Right-wing authoritarianism

We measured right-wing authoritarianism using four items from the RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1981; translated and adapted by Enyedi, 1996). Respondents rated these items on a Likert scale of 1 = disagree strongly to 5 = strongly agree. We created a mean-based index that we used in subsequent analyses. The reliability of this shortened scale is acceptable (Cronbach $\alpha = .74$).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Regarding the justification of violence against different outgroups, the number of valid responses, the means and standard deviations are seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Justification of violence against the outgroups. Number of valid responses, means, and standard deviations of the groups.

	Number of responses	Mean (on a 1–5 scale)	Standard deviation
Terrorists	963	3.91	1.34
Criminals	942	3.67	1.35
Roma	922	2.85	1.34
Authoritarian leaders undermining democracy	914	2.79	1.30
Banks	907	2.61	1.37
Politicians	906	2.60	1.34
Multinational companies	905	2.43	1.29
Jews	895	2.31	1.26
Lesbian and gay people	915	2.23	1.25

Note. Bigger means indicate more justified violence

Table 4. Correlation matrix between main measures.

	1	2	3	4	
1. Propensity for radical protest	1				$M = 1.11$ $SD = .27$
2. RWA	.02	1			$M = 2.62$ $SD = .71$
3. The justification of violence against symbolically threatening groups	.21**	.31**	1		$M = 2.56$ $SD = 1.11$
4. The justification of violence against physically dangerous groups	.11**	.13**	.43**	1	$M = 3.79$ $SD = 1.27$

Note. Statistical significance is indicated at the following level: ** $p < .01$.

Respondents thought that violence can be justified mostly against terrorists, and least against lesbian and gay people. To check whether aggression against one kind of group was more accepted than against other groups, we conducted a paired-samples t -test. It showed that respondents accepted more aggression against physically dangerous groups than against symbolically threatening groups ($t(933) = -29.22$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.03$).

The Pearson correlations between propensity for radical protest, right-wing authoritarianism, and the justification of violence against symbolically threatening and physically dangerous groups are presented in Table 4. Propensity for radical protest and RWA did not correlate with each other significantly, indicating that we measured different constructs.

Hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling

To check the connection between right-wing authoritarianism, propensity for radical protest, and the justification of violence against symbolically threatening and physically dangerous groups, we conducted structural equation modelling (SEM). We used bootstrapping with 2000 re-samples in AMOS (Arbuckle, 2013). The SEM model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Interestingly, confirmatory factor analysis revealed that Roma people and authoritarian leaders undermining democracy loaded on the dangerous factor as well, but these factor loadings were quite low (Roma people: $r = .15$, $p < .001$; authoritarian leaders undermining democracy: $r = .22$, $p < .001$). Nonetheless, allowing these two groups to load also on the physically dangerous factor enhanced the model fit. We also allowed three correlated errors in our model (see Figure 1), which were theoretically plausible, and improved the model fit. Our model showed acceptable fit: $\chi^2(180) = 940.41$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .076, CFI = .922, TLI = .909, NFI = .905. As we assumed, right-wing authoritarianism was a stronger predictor of justification of violence against symbolically threatening groups ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$, CI: .45, .60) than propensity for radical protest ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$, CI: .07, .22), and the difference between the two predictors is highly significant, as there was no overlap between the 95% confidence intervals. Right-wing authoritarianism also significantly explained the justification of violence against physically dangerous groups ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$, CI: .21, .37), but propensity for radical protest did not predict it significantly ($\beta = .06$, $p < .136$, CI: -.02, .12), in line with our hypothesis.

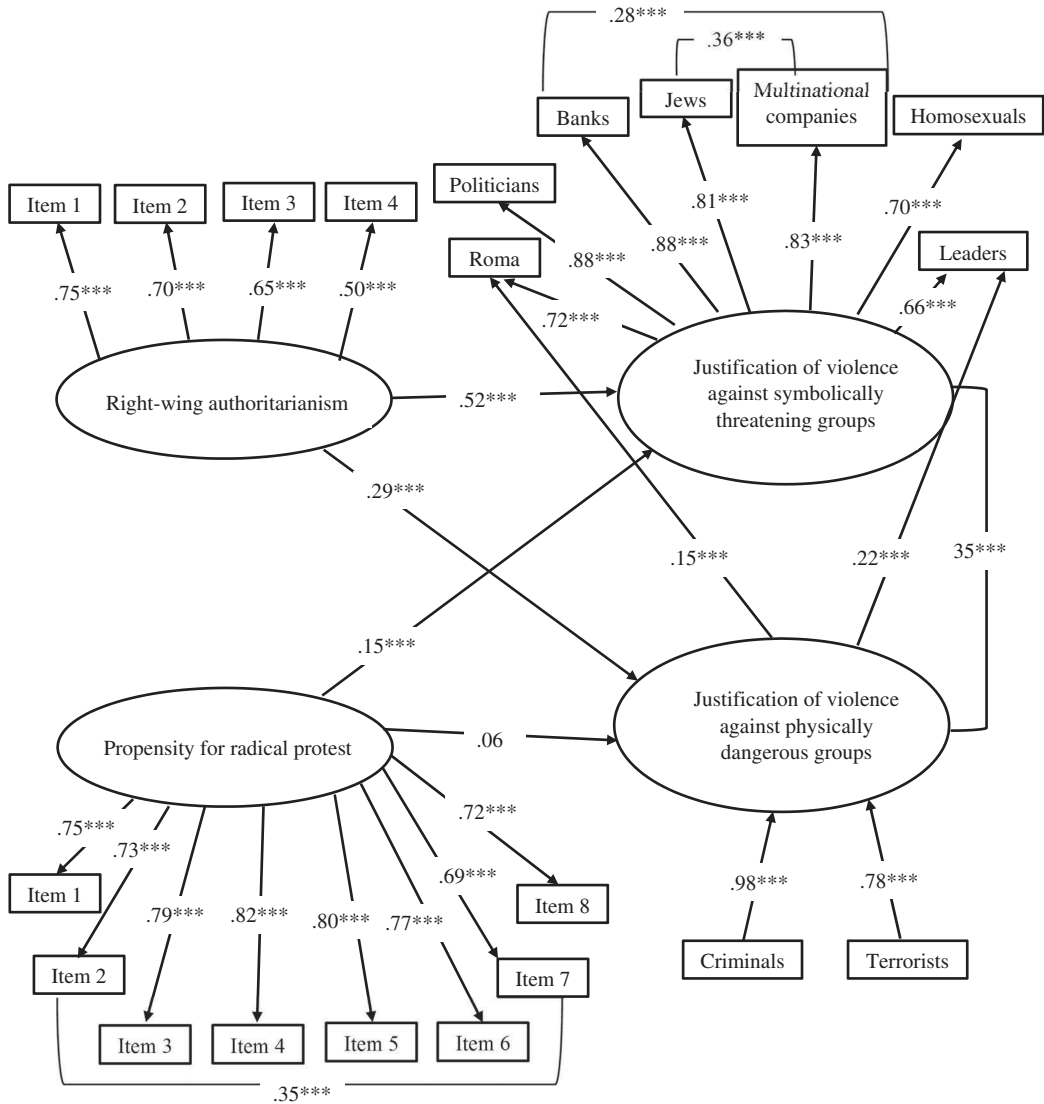


Figure 1. The relationship between right-wing authoritarianism, propensity for radical protest, and the justification of violence against symbolically threatening and physically dangerous groups.

Note. Standardized regression coefficients and correlations are displayed with probability values.*** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Hungary is an important place for investigating the justification of intergroup violence owing to the special economic and political situation, which resulted in intolerance for inequality (Tóth, 2008), alienation from the political institutions (Kovács, 2013), penal populist attitudes (Boda et al., 2015), and hostility towards minorities (Bustikova, 2015). These factors are the sources of discontent, resentment, and propensity for intergroup violence. In Hungary, dominant social norms and public discussions in the political arena create an environment where violence can be seen as justified and necessary; therefore,

it is crucial to identify the psychological mechanisms of accepting and legitimizing intergroup violence.

We investigated whether violence can be justified against symbolically threatening and physically dangerous groups in the context of contemporary Hungarian society. In order to demonstrate the distinction between physically dangerous and symbolically threatening groups, groups were selected that often appear in Hungarian public discourse. We presumed that right-wing authoritarianism has a more important role in explaining the justification of intergroup aggression than propensity for radical protest, and that those who justify violence against symbolically threatening groups are higher in right-wing authoritarianism. Both of our assumptions were supported. This result is not surprising as RWA ensures the ideological, value-based legitimization that helps to let aggression be seen justified (Gerber & Jackson, 2017), but propensity for radical protest does not give such ideological legitimization. According to a recent study, negative stereotypes about different outgroups' norm-violating misbehaviour justified their moral exclusion for those high in RWA (Hadarics & Kende, 2018b), which is also parallel with our findings. Authoritarians are highly sensitive to threats related to stability, order, social cohesion, and the physical integrity of the ingroup, which are common reasons against norm-breaker and dangerous groups (Cohrs et al., 2005a; Duckitt, 2001, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007), but those high in propensity for radical protest are not susceptible to these threats. Interestingly, right-wing authoritarianism was a much stronger predictor of the justification of violence against symbolically threatening groups than against physically dangerous groups, contrary to empirical research which states that RWA predicts hostility towards both type of groups equally (Asbrock et al., 2010). One possible explanation might be that although those high in right-wing authoritarianism are more susceptible to threats related to the physical integrity of the ingroup, safety is a basic human need for all (Maslow, 1943), but adherence to norms and tradition is not. Consequently, the variance of justification of violence against physically dangerous groups explained by right-wing authoritarianism was much smaller, but still strong.

The acceptance of violence towards these groups differed significantly: respondents thought that aggressive behaviour against physically dangerous groups is more justified than against symbolically threatening groups. Aggression was the most acceptable against terrorists and criminals which makes sense as they pose direct threat to individuals, so the reason for self-defence might be sufficient to legitimize violence against them. Nonetheless, symbolically threatening groups threaten the existing moral norms and conventions of the society, so their harm is less tangible (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). This category included Roma people, Jews, lesbian and gay people, politicians, banks, multinational companies, and authoritarian leaders undermining democracy. As an alternative interpretation, these groups can be regarded as "distrusted" because besides violating the moral norms and conventions of the majority, they might elicit distrust in the perceiver. Participants may have perceived these groups differently: for instance, the term "authoritarian leaders undermining democracy" has two meanings in the highly polarized Hungarian politics. For supporters of the opposition parties, the authoritarian leader is Viktor Orbán, who poses a real threat to Hungary's EU membership by creating an illiberal democracy. Nonetheless, his supporters perceive the situation in the opposite direction because of governmental propaganda: in their eyes, the European Union and George Soros are the enemies. According to Viktor Orbán's rhetoric, George Soros pulls

the strings, and he also controls the EU and poses danger to Hungarian democracy via spreading dangerous liberalism in Hungary (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018). Consequently, this term has two meanings depending on one's partisanship (supporting or opposing the government). According to confirmatory factor analysis and SEM, authoritarian leaders undermining democracy and Roma people were weakly related to physically dangerous groups as well. This makes sense because authoritarian leaders undermining democracy can also pose a threat to the physical integrity of individuals, and criminality often appears in anti-Roma stereotypes in Hungary (see e.g., Kende, Hadarics, & Láštiová, 2017).

The novelty of our contribution in the literature of right-wing authoritarianism is that we widened the categories that represent symbolic threat. Previous studies that aimed to investigate the dual-process model of prejudice used groups that cause disunity and disagreement in society, such as atheists, feminists, protestors, or groups criticizing authority, and ethnic or sexual minorities that seem to reject and violate the norms and values accepted by the authoritarian person (Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; Hadarics & Kende, 2018a), and RWA predicted prejudice, hostility, and violence towards them (Altemeyer, 2006; Thomsen et al., 2008). We also included powerful and influential groups such as politicians, authoritarian leaders undermining democracy, banks, and multinational companies, all which possess control over resources, and were not expected to correlate with right-wing authoritarianism. Nonetheless, these groups loaded on the same factor as other symbolically threatening groups, which means that they all pose threat to the authoritarian person. Our research shows that RWA also justifies violence against groups that have high status and seem competent (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), at least in a post-socialist country. The system change and the recent economic crisis heightened people's intolerance for inequality and their demand for redistribution (Tóth, 2008), and perhaps made authoritarians distrust and hate these groups for violating these principles.

Our work has some practical implications. As right-wing authoritarianism justifies violence against both symbolically threatening and physically dangerous groups, interventions could target the RWA-based threat to reduce the justification of violence. RWA is better conceptualized as an ideological attitude dimension than a personality trait (Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, & Heled, 2010), which implies that right-wing authoritarianism is a more flexible construct and can be influenced by threat. For instance, higher levels of external threat can enhance RWA, but RWA can also increase perceived threat, so the association is bidirectional (Onraet, Dhont, & Van Hiel, 2014). Although most studies focus on how threat increases RWA (see e.g., Asbrock & Fritzsche, 2013; Cohrs & Asbrock, 2009; Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Onraet et al., 2014), almost no studies exist related to the decrease in authoritarian attitudes. Political discourse depicting outgroups as a threat also matter. For instance, Donald Trump's authoritarian statements about race, sexuality, gender, and foreign affairs were the most favourable among those high in RWA (Choma & Hanoch, 2017), indicating that threat-inducing political discourses also play a role in this process. Consequently, future interventions could target the RWA-based threat to reduce prejudice. Self-affirmation interventions have been successful in reducing both prejudice and identity threat (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Zárate & Garza, 2002).

Limitations, conclusion and future directions

Our study has some limitations. First, we used a shortened version of the right-wing authoritarianism scale due to the length of the survey. This scale has also been criticized by scholars because it measures RWA as a unidimensional concept and because of the psychometric difficulties related to double-barrelled questions (see e.g., Duckitt et al., 2010; Funke, 2005). Nonetheless, there is no reliable test for measuring multidimensional right-wing authoritarianism in the Hungarian language, which is an important problem Hungarian scholars should address in the near future. The scale of Enyedi (1996) is the most commonly used scale for measuring RWA in Hungary, and was created from Altemeyer's instrument; therefore, we used it in our research. The shortened scale was reliable, so we could successfully grasp the construct of RWA. On the other hand, we did not have any hypothesis regarding the differential discriminant validity of the three social attitude dimensions of RWA. As Altemeyer's RWA scale correlated highly with the refined scale of Duckitt et al. (2010), which indicates that they measured the same construct (Duckitt et al., 2010), we opted for using the old scale in our research. Second, we selected only two groups to represent physically dangerous groups. We thought that groups that often appear in Hungarian public discourse were mostly symbolically threatening, but not physically harmful, and that is why we could list more symbolically threatening groups. Third, we could have included more predictors in our study, including social dominance orientation, relative deprivation, political alienation, or low political power. Nonetheless, in spite of its role in explaining various intergroup phenomena (Ho et al., 2015; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), high social dominance orientation (SDO), is not so prevalent in Hungary, as SDO scores usually tend to be lower than that of RWA (see e.g., Kende, Nyúl, Hadarics, Wessenauer, & Hunyadi, 2018). A recent meta-analysis assessed research related to antisemitism and antigypsyism between 2005 and 2017 in Hungary revealed that right-wing authoritarianism is a more important predictor of anti-minority attitudes than SDO (Kende et al., 2018). We did not include relative deprivation, political alienation, and low political power, as they are all antecedents of radical protest (see e.g., Daskin, 2016; Lemieux & Asal, 2010; Muller & Jukam, 1983; Staub, 1999, 2000). We only measured the propensity for radical protest, as it is an expression of strong political discontent and dissatisfaction (Muller & Jukam, 1983), but it would be useful in future studies to also investigate its antecedents as separate predictors of intergroup violence. Finally, as our results were correlational, we cannot establish whether right-wing authoritarianism and propensity for radical protest were the causes of the justification of violence, or they co-occurred based on other factors. Experimental evidence in future research should establish the causality in the established connection.

Despite these weaknesses, we found evidence that people high on right-wing authoritarianism were more likely to feel that violence was justified against certain groups, while people with higher propensity for radical protest justified violence in a lower degree. We revealed that right-wing authoritarianism plays an important role in the ideological justification of violence against those groups that don't harm directly, but violate the accepted norms and values in a society, even if they are influential and have high status. Although aggression is more acceptable against physically harmful

groups, our findings help us to understand why aggression can be acceptable against symbolically threatening groups, and also people's motivations to harm them.

In summary, our findings can help decision-makers and non-governmental organizations to design more efficient interventions to reduce violence. Also, they underline the importance of the dominant political discourses in the justification of violence. However, they also showed that interventions should take into account the underlying motivations related to right-wing authoritarianism when tackling intergroup violence, and identify methods based on the specific intergroup contexts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Restrictions apply to the availability of the data set which was used under licence for this study. In spite of our best intention to comply with the data-sharing standard of the APA (Ethical Standard 8.14), we cannot deposit our data set in an open repository for proprietary reasons. The materials will be available upon individual request from Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute.

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